

Mobile home residents sue city for loss, moving costs

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By Jan Ackerman, Post-Gazette Staff Writer

Residents and former residents of a Lincoln Place mobile home park that is being demolished to make way for a city-owned community center are demanding that the government compensate them for lost trailers and relocation costs.

On Friday, a group of residents filed a lawsuit against Pittsburgh, seeking damages for families who were displaced and sometimes forced to abandon their mobile homes because they couldn't afford to move them.

The lawsuit, filed by attorneys for Neighborhood Legal Services Association and Community Justice Project, asked the Allegheny County courts to appoint a board of viewers under the state Eminent Domain Code to determine "just compensation and relocation expenses" for five families who still live there and for several who already were evicted.

The city has offered \$700,000 for the 7.2-acre site, which Edward J. Raimondi Jr. of Munhall bought for \$500,000 in July 2000. The city plans to build a community center for Lincoln Place and a future fire station on the site.

Raimondi has been evicting residents and demolishing trailers that are left behind in order to meet a city requirement that he present a clean piece of land with no environmental concerns.

In the suit, NLS attorney Eileen D. Yacknin and Evalynn B. Welling, Community Justice Project attorney, contend that the city is trying to avoid its responsibilities to the tenants under state eminent domain code and the federal Housing and Community Development Act by having Raimondi carry out the evictions.

The attorneys contended that the city has an obligation to pay the tenants for damages they have sustained by being evicted for property that will be used for a public purpose.

"Many of them were compelled to abandon the mobile homes they had owned for years, because they lacked the financial resources -- typically \$2,500 to \$3,000 -- which would have been required to move their homes from the property," Yacknin wrote.

Yesterday, Deputy Mayor Sal Sirabella said he had not seen the lawsuit. He said the city still maintains that the residents of the mobile home park must seek any compensation from Raimondi, not from the city.

"Our agreement of sale is with Mr. Raimondi, and the issues between him and the former tenants are his to resolve," said Sirabella.

"I believe we have a sales agreement that has been signed," Sirabella said, adding that no closing date has been set.

One of the plaintiffs, Joan Tate, who is disabled, was forced to move into a federally subsidized rental housing in May because of "increasingly uninhabitable conditions in the park," the suit said.

Tate, who receives less than \$600 a month from Supplemental Social Security, could not afford to pay several thousand dollars to relocate her mobile home, which was appraised at \$2,500. As soon as she moved out, the mobile home was demolished, the suit said.